



UNITED NATIONS STAFF UNIONS

Friday 1 February 2019

Dear Secretary-General,

As we start 2019, allow us to wish you well in addressing the many challenges our organization faces. As you have often said, the United Nations is nothing without its staff. For this reason you made it your priority on the first day of your term to meet with staff representatives and promised to work in partnership with us.

We understand that the last two years have coincided with extraordinary global change, existential threats to the multilateral system and funding and liquidity problems. In the process, other matters have taken priority. We therefore feel it is important to raise our concerns directly with you as we have not been able to address them effectively through the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC), despite our repeated attempts.

Staff management relations: These depend on a two-way communication. In the last year, we noticed proposals affecting staff submitted to the General Assembly without the staff representatives being informed (for example, the latest proposal on the Global Service Delivery Model) or even being consulted (for example, a proposal to massively increase how much retirees can earn at the UN while still receiving a full pension, which has a negative effect on succession planning); this despite us having raised concerns on previous such occurrences. These instances have challenged our ability to place trust in the established procedures that in the past seemed to work relatively well.

Mr. Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations

Further, we have witnessed repeated attempts by DMSPC to circumvent the Staff-Management Committee (established with the approval of the General Assembly as the standard procedure for consultation with staff unions) and instead attempting the use of email in order to reach agreement on far-reaching policy changes on issues such as staff selection and promotion, downsizing, calculation of benefits for staff in the field, unauthorized absences, and determination of working hours and overtime for general service and security staff, among others. With regards to staff selection, a sudden push by DMSPC to implement changes has been followed since October 2018 by an inexplicable silence. We note that none of these issues is urgent and that Chapter 8 of the staff rules rightly require that with changes to staff welfare and conditions of service, staff representatives be afforded effective participation in the process, which is further clarified in the administrative instructions as an annual face-to-face meeting and regular video conference meetings throughout the year. The SMC framework actually provides for a quicker and more comprehensive treatment of these issues than laborious email exchanges. And in cases of urgency, meetings can be convened by video conference within two weeks, although we must draw a distinction between poor organization and genuine urgency for doing so.

Misconduct: A recent survey carried out by staff unions pointed to a lack of trust in the organization's ability to deal with all types of misconduct. Staff reported high levels of abuse of authority, discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, in that order. The overwhelming majority of staff are reluctant to report misconduct, largely because they do not trust the system and fear reprisals, particularly when such reprisals have been made by senior staff. Further, a large majority of those who filed complaints were unhappy with the manner in which investigations were carried out and with their final outcomes. Your own survey drew similar conclusions.

Staff are pleased with the efforts you have made in tackling sexual harassment, but note that these cases, as egregious as they are, are but a tip of the prohibited conduct iceberg. More efforts will need to be made to tackle abuse of authority in all forms, and much more will need to be done than currently accepted by DMSPC to encourage reporting, protect whistleblowers and staff who cooperate with investigators and tribunals, demonstrate accountability and resolution. We realise that this requires more resources, both in education and investigation, but to achieve truly harmonious relations within the workplace and to rid the UN of its culture of fear, these are necessary.

Delegation of authority: In your words, you have provided department managers with unprecedented powers in how they manage human resources, finances and procurement. While this could be a positive development, we are disappointed that despite multiple requests, we were not consulted on the details and have yet to hear from DMSPC about the checks and balances. In an organization where many senior managers have little prior management experience and where accountability is political and deficient, we believe there is a strong risk of abuse of authority, particularly given the weak existing controls on prohibited conduct noted

above, and these are likely to undo any gains made by hiring new investigators. We would appreciate that this issue be addressed urgently.

Global town-halls: We note that, to-date, those intervening from the field on behalf of staff are either representatives of mission management teams or of human resources. We would therefore appreciate that the Field Staff Union executive be given a chance to speak for the field instead, as they represent all DPKO/DPA international staff in field missions.

We realise that the range of issues we have raised is broad, but this reflects the challenges we are currently facing in establishing a productive interface with DMSPC. To this end, we would like to propose a video conference directly with you in order to review and identify solutions to these concerns so that we can continue to maintain confidence in DMSPC's engagement in the SMC process.

Yours sincerely

ESCAP Staff Association
Field Staff Union
Staff Council of ESCWA
Staff Council of ECA
Staff Council of ECLAC
Staff Council of UNHCR
UN Criminal Tribunals Staff Union
UNDP/UNOPS/UNFPA/UN Women Staff Council
UNHCR Staff Council
UNICEF Global Staff Association
UNOG Staff Coordinating Council
UN Staff Union (New York)
UN Staff Union Nairobi
UN Staff Union Vienna
UN University Staff Council

cc:

Mr. Hany Abdel Aziz, President of the Staff-Management Committee

Ms. Jan Beagle, USG of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance